

Episode 389: How to Start Fresh (Even If Last Year Was Hard)

00:00 Overcoming Classroom Challenges

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

Last year there were so many behavior issues, disruptions, it was crazy. Can it be any better next year? The answer is yes, and we're gonna talk about how. Well, welcome back to the Teach 4 the Heart podcast where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. I'm here today with Jen Frey one of our Teach 4 the Heart Plus team members. Jen, thank you for joining me today.

Jen Frey (00:22)

~ so glad to be here, Linda.

Linda Kardamis (00:25)

So today we want to talk to those of you who had a really rough year last year, particularly if it was really rough when it came to student behaviors, classroom management, there were maybe too many disruptions, too much chaos, too many behavior issues that you didn't know what to do with. And you might be wondering, can next year be any better? And if so, how? And I think this is a really, really important thing to talk about.

~ as we dive in. Jen, have you known any teachers who kind of were in that situation?

Jen Frey (00:59)

myself. ~

you know, honestly, what, what was shocking for me was it wasn't between my, it wasn't my first year that was the roughest year. was three or four years in when I went, my gosh, I tried new things this year and it totally started the year off wrong. And I paid for it the whole year. So something's gotta be different this next year, you know, and just that feeling of, but it really set me off balance because I thought, I've done this. Like I have this down.

And then one year or one group of students or a change in curriculum can really set you off and feel like you're just on rough footing.

Linda Kardamis (01:38)

Yeah. my goodness. That's so true. And for me, my biggest difference was between first and second. But I think you said something really powerful there. You said, I did some things in the beginning and so I got off to a bad start. Like the start of the year is such a, sometimes they call it like a magical

time, but it can also be like an awful time, right? Because if you start off right and you get off on that good foot and you get structures in place and you got your relationships going,

It can make the rest of the year so much easier, not that there's no issues, but it's just much more manageable. But if you get off on the wrong foot or something you're doing, you know, sets the wrong tone, you're fighting against that all year. So that's what we want to talk about now really is how do you get your mind ready so that you can set the tone right so that then things can go so much more smoothly.

Jen Frey (02:25)

yeah, and I think it's just so important to kind of the first part that we were gonna talk about was believing that it's possible because luckily for me, I had this example of like, well, it did go well in other years. And so I could say, okay, this was a bad year.

02:43 Believing in Change

You know, I know what I don't want to do now next year I can start back on. So that made it a little bit easier, but you know, that's not always the case. And so what are some other ways that we just need to maybe tweak or, change our mindset? Because maybe we don't believe it's possible.

Linda Kardamis (02:59)

Yeah, and this really is our number one thing. We're out to give you a list of things and this is number one. You do have to believe it's possible, right? Because if you don't think things can change, you're not gonna make the changes needed to change them, right? You're just kind of gonna be stuck in a stuck mindset and nothing much. Even if you make some changes, it's just not gonna work. But Jen, you asked a really good question. You said, well, what if I don't believe things can change, right?

So I think a couple things just off the top of my mind that can be helpful and I'm curious what you would add. I think first of all, talking to people and asking their experiences. Sometimes we feel like I'm the only one that dealt with this or I just don't know what I'm doing or maybe I don't have the personality it takes to be a teacher. And you are not the only one asking those things. my goodness. If nothing else, hop in our Facebook group, [teach4theheart.com](https://www.facebook.com/teach4theheart.com) / Facebook.

~ Ask your question and you will have hundreds of teachers saying, yes, me too. I've been there. We work with teachers all the time in our classroom management programs and these are very common things. But hearing someone else's story, yeah, I was in the same spot. I made these changes. Things are so much better. That can really help build your confidence. And then number two, I think, is just ~ hearing a little bit about learning a little bit about, what are the differences? And we're going to get into some of them here. ~

We also, if you listen to this and think I need more, we have a free training called at [teach4theheart.com](https://www.teach4theheart.com) / free where we basically explain why are things not good and what's gonna make the difference and kind of hearing that and realizing, yeah, yeah, I was doing that. okay, I can

see. That can kind of also help you realize that it is worth it and there is hope. Jen would you add anything to that?

Jen Frey (04:41)

I would just from personal experience, I remember just in a very intimate time with God, he was asking me to do something. This wasn't even a classroom thing, but I think it applies here, that he was asking me to do something and step out, which is what we're doing when we're signing contracts for the next year. ~ But I had all these excuses in my head about why it wouldn't work, why I wasn't the right person for it, why he should just ask somebody else.

God basically just, felt the Holy Spirit say like, do you trust me to handle those things? Like, can I carry that load? How big of a God do you believe I am? And I was like, okay, I guess, you know, a little bit like Moses. I guess I have to do this. ~ But like in the end, was really, it was, I was the barrier to believing it was possible. It wasn't the actual situations, but I had to really address those. And I think as believers, we can get in our own way a lot.

05:36 Creating a Classroom Management Plan

And so when you, you know, if you're doing what Linda is asking or saying about asking other people and seeing what their experiences are, make sure you're asking believing teachers because they're going to have a perspective that is going to match ours. And they're also going to be, you know, sharing from the standpoint of this. also serve a God who can handle our big issues and our frustrations and nothing is a surprise to him. So I think really making sure who are you asking the advice from?

and then taking it with a grain of salt too, because your situation is different than theirs.

Linda Kardamis (06:09)

Yeah. Yeah, but you bring up such a good point, right? Praying about it. Because, you know, if you're teaching, God has called you to this, right? God has put you in this position. He's put you in the classroom. You're assuming you're signed up for another year at this point. And so if he's called you, he's going to equip you, right? And so just kind of just wrestling with that with God, bringing your fears to him. And this is how I fear. I'm afraid. I don't know if this can be better. But then, like you said, believing him, like, no, OK.

All right, you can help me. You can guide me to solutions. You can give me the wisdom I need. You can give me the strength and the courage and whatever it is you feel is lacking. That doesn't mean it's gonna be easy, right? God's paths are not always easy, but he will give us that courage and wisdom to be able to handle it well.

Jen Frey (06:55)

Yeah, and sometimes we need a little reminder for ourselves. you know, if the New Year's Day, we're very big on like, pick a word for the year, but maybe, you know, for next school year to make this, to

remind yourself of this is to pick a, pick a Bible verse and spend the summer memorizing it so that then when times are hard, you can remind yourself of the truths that he said in just in those hard times to keep yourself going.

Linda Kardamis (07:22)

Yeah, that's so good. So number one, believe it is possible. And if you don't, spend some time thinking and meditating on that. Number two, have a classroom management plan. Okay, this is huge. And I'll share my personal story. I didn't share much about my turnaround, but my bad year was my first year. And I remember actually my college professor saying,

you need to have a plan for what you're gonna do, like you should write it down. And I was like, okay. And I honestly don't remember why I didn't do that. You just get busy with all the other things and I was, my curriculum and all this stuff, but I never did that. And I just like, I started this year and these things started happening and I did not know what to do. I knew what I didn't wanna do, but I didn't know what I was gonna do instead.

Jen Frey (07:58)

Maybe it

Linda Kardamis (08:10)

And so I just kind of like gave them the eye and like hope that was enough and just I ended up letting a lot go. Other teachers, some teachers end up letting stuff go and they don't have a plan. Others are just wildly inconsistent. ~ So you have to, I don't know which camp you guys might fall into, but you might find yourself going, man, I don't let everything go. I come down hard, but you probably, might be coming down hard one day, letting it go the next day in the middle. Like you're just all over and it's just kind of depends on your mood, right? So in either case, whether we're letting things go,

or whether we are just wildly inconsistent, that does not set the right tone for our students, right? They are seeing either this teacher is super inconsistent, I don't know what to expect, or they're just seeing I'm just getting away with stuff. So they just, in either case, they keep pushing and they can also sense that we don't know what we're gonna do. ~ And they can sense that uncertainty and it also causes them to pounce. I don't care if they're in kindergarten, they have these radars, they just know.

And they sense it and they push the line further and further and further and further and further. And it's, it really, we can end up in a disaster very quickly. So yeah, October, called into the principal's office, you know, all these things are happening behind your back. You got to get it together, you know, go in the car, cry, all of that, right? So that's what happens when you don't have a plan. So it's really, really important to actually think through how am I going to handle various situations.

Jen Frey (09:32)

Yeah, and you asked the question of like, I don't know why I didn't do it. I would imagine part of that is we don't realize, A, how important it is, and B, even like, what should I put on it? You know, we think

like, okay, like for me, I really knew I need to have procedures and I need to have like a system for what I expect and what I want them to do. But I didn't have a plan for.

what if they don't do it? Because I was a kid who did it. Like I just did what they asked. So it didn't even occur to me that they wouldn't. We were just stupid, but like that's what I thought. Like I didn't consider it. And so I think we just don't know what we don't know. And so really having a structure from somebody else, I mean, at Teach 4 the Heart we have Class Management 101 is a great spot to do it. And then over the summer we offer years to do that in class, which is a four week class.

where you go through every single piece and like with other teachers. And I think it's a really powerful piece too. ~ but just having a plan with all the pieces laid out is so important because we're gonna, we're gonna lean into the things that we're naturally good at, but we really have to put the effort also into those other pieces that are like, ~ I'm not so good at that. Because if we don't address it in, in writing out a plan or figuring out at least spending some time thinking about it.

We get into the school year and that's where you said they recognize it and they will just like dig their little fingers in and find it. So you don't want that to be your downfall is that you just didn't think about it.

Linda Kardamis (11:02)

Yeah, absolutely. Right. think sometimes we just, yeah, it just, it just doesn't happen for one reason or another because we sit down and we're like, I'm kind of blank. So, you know, hopefully it'll just solve itself, which it doesn't. so that, Jen mentioned your smooth running class. So if you are saying, yeah, I need this and I don't know how to do it. ~ your smooth running class is a program starting actually here. think, I think within the next week, depending on when you're listening to this.

Jen Frey (11:13)

Yes.

Linda Kardamis (11:26)

~ And we are going to go through it with you. have templates with copy and paste idea banks. So you are making a personalized plan. It's important you don't just copy someone else's plan because you won't really agree. Like you are yourself and you need it to align with what you think is best. But we have like basically copy and paste idea banks so you can see three or four options and just pick and tweak the one that works for you. So we'll walk you through the whole process in your Smooth Running class. If you go to teach4theheart.com / smooth, you can get all the details and sign up.

So having a classroom management plan is so important so that when students cross the line, you know what to do and you can address it. if you start that on day one, it sets the tone right away. Number three, though, this is also something you want to start on day one, clearly teach both your procedures and your expectations. So it's really important that you think through ahead of time. Jenny, were talking about this. What are my procedures? How am going to handle just the various, you know, practical elements of the classroom?

And then also, what are my expectations? ~ And then you have to clearly teach them to your students. And we've talked about this before. Maybe I can find a link in episode in the notes where we talk about the steps to teaching procedures. We recommend a four-step process that I don't have time to go into in detail, but you explain it. Then you practice it right then and there. You correct anything that went wrong, and you redo it if needed. That's really powerful because it really cements ~ in students' minds that, OK, I actually need to do this.

12:51 Teaching Procedures and Expectations

~ And then expectations too though. So ~ One of the things though for expectations that I found as well is that a lot of times We actually haven't clarified our expectations We just are like, yeah, you know, we think we think we know what we expect right like yeah good behavior But then something happens and we're like caught off guard. Hmm. Is that okay? Just a simple example I remember seeing a kid put their head down on their desk and thinking hmm

Am I gonna allow that or not? And I'm trying to decide this in the middle of teaching equations. And so that's not the time to decide that. We wanna think through that stuff ahead of time. And even something as simple as talking, most teachers don't actually want zero talking ever. It's like, well, I want it now, but not this time. So you really have to think through that and crystallize it, because there's no way to communicate it. There's no way to hold the line if you don't know where the line is. So that's actually part of in your smoother in class when we create the plan, the first step is actually clarifying the expectations.

So we've got to get clear on those. And then when we start the school year, we have to very clearly teach them to our students.

Jen Frey (14:51)

And I think building out and adding to those expectations as you go through, know, it is the first part of the plan. But as you get to the procedures or you get to the follow up pieces, you realize, yeah, I really do. This is an underlying expectation that I have. So I need to go back and I need to list it out ~ and just and just that I think that's an important recognition to you that our classroom management plans are always evolving. So we may have a certain expectation one year and then the next year student group.

Linda Kardamis (15:16)

Mm-hmm.

Jen Frey (15:21)

You're like, okay, well, I need to tweak a little bit. You know, they can handle more so I can give them more. You know, my expectation can be higher or in reverse. You know, just I need to address things differently this year because of where they're at.

15:35 Insisting on Consistency

Linda Kardamis (15:35)

Yeah. Yep, absolutely. So thinking it through, adjusting as needed to your group, and then clearly teaching your procedures and your expectations during those first few days or weeks, depending on, you can't get everything in on day one. But teaching that over the course of that and making sure you're really keeping it clear. And then number four, then you need to insist that the expectations and procedures are followed. And when they're not, respond consistently. And this is the part that

That can be hard. But it's not complicated though, right? Especially if we've made a plan, that's the key. Responding consistently is incredibly difficult if you haven't thought about it, because in the moment you're just like, I don't know what to do. But if you've thought about it ahead of time and you know what you're going to do when students cross the line, now all you have to do is be as consistent as you can. You're never going to be perfect, but you just try to follow your plan as closely as possible. And once again, if you start with that,

from the first moment the student's walking your class, or at least, you know, quickly, right on there, ~ that it's gonna set a tone and it's going to keep so many issues from happening in the first place. Because students are gonna pick up, she knows what she's doing. she's not letting little things go, so I'm not gonna try, you know, steps two, three, four, six. And it's gonna make such a big difference.

Jen Frey (16:43)

Thank

Yeah, and I think this partly goes back to how well did I teach the procedure because sometimes what I, you know, as I didn't think of this before, but as you were talking, I realized there was one time I had this review game for students and it was random kids got picked to answer a problem and they had to come up on the board. But I hadn't specifically said and taught the procedure for, you know, how to answer it, who had, you know,

Whose work did it have to be like? I mean, you have to get kind of granular when you're teaching expectations and procedures. And my students found a loophole and I was so upset and mad. And I was just like, ~ you're undermining the whole thing. But really it was on me. I hadn't thought through what are all the steps and what are, and top in that so that then, I mean, they weren't doing anything wrong. They were just.

trying to win the game.

that sometimes it is us in the way that we taught it. We need to take ownership and say, okay, I'm sorry, I didn't realize I needed to do this. So let's go through it again. And you just reteach the procedure again. Sometimes it is.

no, it's I taught it fine. You just need to do it. Like now I need to give the consequence and I'll be honest that was not where I was good at because I was always questioning in my head like is that okay? I said it wasn't okay, but in this case, is it okay? And so just You know, I needed to be more firm. Do you have any like tips on? I'm in that moment like any fallbacks or like if you haven't thought through this is how I want to handle this. What do we do?

Linda Kardamis (18:10)

Yes.

Yeah, so when we make a plan, we actually create a default response for something we haven't thought of yet. So we do kind of have a, you know, something you can say. For me, it was, you know, see me after class or I'm going to have to do something about that or I'm going to come talk to you later. If it's just like, my goodness, I don't know. Because yeah, there's, there's always no matter how well you plan, there's always going to be something that pops up that you're like, nope, didn't put, what did they put a in the trash can on my list of possibilities? You know, I mean, it's just, you just don't know what's going to happen. ~

But yeah, think the more you think through ahead of time though, the more confident you are and the more situations you do have. So that's why when we do our, you're smoothing classroom, classroom manager 101, it's pretty detailed. We think through a lot of different areas and flesh out a lot of things. And then I think in the moment, I mean, I don't know, I've told this story before, the first time I had to give a kid a detention, I literally like had to call up my husband to try to like, I don't know what I wanted him to do, but it's like, I needed a pep talk.

to like get the courage to like give this kid a detention. I just, it was just not my thing. It's still, I still struggle with it, but it's kind of that, I think that's another powerful thing about making the plan is like you're predetermining this is what I'm gonna do, like I'm pre-deciding and choosing something that you feel like, no, this is what I should do. This is right and fair and I agree with it and I'm aligned with it. And so then in the, and like kind of deciding I'm just gonna do it. So that in the moment the decision is already made, now I just have to do it.

And final piece of advice, you won't always be consistent as much as you try. And I've seen teachers fall into this thing of like, well, I didn't correct so and so, so now I can't correct so and and now I can't. And just think for a minute, like that doesn't work. You will never correct anyone again. So if you miss one, just get the next one. Like you just get right back on. Missing one is not the end of the world as long as you're mostly consistent.

Jen Frey (20:14)

the next one.

20:21 Building Relationships and Teaching Effectively

Linda Kardamis (20:21)

so those are our four things that we think will make a huge difference. If you believe it's possible, create a classroom management plan, clearly teach your procedures and expectations, and then insist that they're followed. You are sending all the right signals to your students. Now we're running out of time, but real quick, I wanna give just a kind of caveat and some other pieces that are also important, okay? So these are a couple other things where if these are missing, you're gonna have problems. So one is just we have to love our students

We have to build relationships with them. If they don't know that you care, it's not going to go well. Maybe they would be afraid of you, but you're going to miss out on those opportunities to really make a difference. So you have to love them. You have to build relationships. I think that's assumed, but I don't want to assume that. So I wanted to say that. And then there's another piece too that can really undermine what we're doing. And that is you need to actually be good at teaching your subject. And that's a little bit hard to say because ~

It's like a hard truth, but you need to like honestly look at yourself and say, are my students perpetually confused or perpetually bored? And there's always gonna be a couple of students that are confused any given day. But if it's like a lot of my class is confused a lot of the time, or a lot of my class is really bored a lot of the time, they're going to really struggle to learn and they're going to struggle to behave. the best customer-in-advance structures will help.

but only so much. So that's like an underlying issue that you might need to look at. So do encourage you to give yourself an honest look if that's part of the issue. If it's like, yeah, I might not actually be that doing that good of a job of actually teaching my subject. And if so, that's like a whole other thing, but it's something you can address. It's something you can get help with. Go to your administrator, go to your fellow teachers, instructional coach and say, hey, I'm recognizing this. Can you point me in the right direction? That is really worth investing in.

Instead of these other things, you need these other things too, but that's a really key piece as well.

Jen Frey (22:21)

Yeah, and I think that's really important too. know, lot of teachers, especially at Christian schools are coming out of the workplace and into teaching. And so, you know, you may be really good at engineering, but the explaining of math in the classroom may be harder. you know, it's a totally different skill set. And it's okay to say, just need to grow in this skill because that's all it is. It's a skill that you practice and you learn. And if you've made it to be an engineer or you've made it out in the workplace, like,

You can do it. You've proved I am smart enough to do these things so I can grow in this other skill.

Linda Kardamis (22:55)

Yeah, yeah. So, encourage you to reach out, ask for help, view it as a skill, and just continue to learn and grow. So, real quick, let's review our four things. Believe it's possible, have a classroom management plan, clearly teach your procedures and expectations, and then insist they're followed and respond consistently when they're not. If you're saying, need help, once again, we want to invite you to your Smooth Running Class four-week program where you can, there's just videos dropped each week along with the plans and templates. Everything is designed for you, but you will walk out of there with

clear expect, all your expectations clarified, you will think through your procedures, you'll think about, you know, positive reinforcement consequences, and then you will have a written plan for how am going to address all of the common classroom issues. So you will be confident, you will be ready to be consistent, and kind of know how to start that school year right. So if you're interested in joining us, go to [teach4theheart.com / smooth](http://teach4theheart.com/smooth). It starts July 6th. So coming up here very, very quickly. Jen, any final thoughts you want to share as we wrap up?

Jen Frey (23:54)

Well, I guess I would just share, you know, a little follow up to what I started at the beginning that, maybe it's not, you're not in your first year, maybe you're not just going into teaching that you need this classroom management plan. Maybe you've been teaching for 13 or 20 years, but you've never done it and written it out. I mean, we have lots and lots of stories from teachers over the years who have taken your smoothing class or have gone through Classroom Management 101. And they say, I can't believe how much this helped me as a veteran teacher. So if you're feeling like you need

or just want the space to list out those details, but you've been teaching for a long time, you're going to be in good company. You're not going to be alone. And that's, it's still a good time to do it, even if you're not in your first years.

Linda Kardamis (24:35)

Yes, yeah, and You might have been feeling like, man, this was easy and it's been getting harder in recent years just with how students, you know, students' behaviors are different. And that's a great time to say, okay, I'm just going to step back, like you said, take some time and really just shore up this area so that you are bringing all these skills that's going to make it easier. And I think you'll emerge really, really confident and ready to go.

Well, thank you guys so much for listening to this episode. It's been brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. All views and opinions are our own and don't necessarily reflect those of the Herzog Foundation. We look forward to speaking with you again soon. In the meantime, teacher, 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 4 the heart