

Episode 393: How to Prepare for the First Day of School

00:00 Setting the Tone for the School Year

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

The first day of school sets the tone for the entire school year. What do you need to do now to make sure you're ready? 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. Today we're talking about how to make sure you are ready for day one of school.

And I'm joined today by Beki Jones, one of our Teach 4 the Heart Plus mentors and team members here. Beki, thanks again for joining us.

Beki Jones (00:27)

Happy to be here.

Linda Kardamis (00:28)

So we are talking today about how to prepare for the first day of school. And this is actually a huge topic. It's not like we're gonna cover the entire thing, but we're gonna focus in today on what we want to do to be ready, particularly when it comes to setting the right tone with our classroom management. Because I've been thinking about how, you know, if we're like, man, there was a lot of chaos last year, I was interrupted a million times, I was constantly dealing with behavior, I didn't know what to do.

If we want things to be different next year, we have to do something different, right? That's the def you've heard that. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting different results. But sometimes we do that. You know, maybe a fresh start will just fix it. But it won't, right? So what do we need to do now to kind of get ready and get going into this? We're gonna talk about some of the pre-planning that we need to do. Beki, do you have any like initial encouragement though for teachers before we dive into those details?

01:24 Clarifying and Raising Expectations

Beki Jones (01:24)

Pre-planning pays off. And once you do that first year's pre-planning, it only gets easier and better. So take the time to do it right now.

Linda Kardamis (01:32)

Yeah, that's really good advice.

So let's think through some of the things that we need to pre-plan. And in particular, hopefully when you're listening to this, you still have a couple weeks before school starts. If it's sooner, well, you just you just consolidate it and just do what you can before then. but one thing that is really worth your time to think about before school starts is your expectations for your students. Okay. And two things I'm gonna encourage you to do: one, clarify them. And number two,

potentially raise them. Okay. So first of all, we need to clarify our expectations because I found for myself and for a lot of teachers that I work with, a lot of times we're actually not as clear as we think we are on what the expectations should be, right? For example, talking. Very few of us actually want our kids to never talk. Like we do want them to talk.

But only at certain times and only if they're asking the right questions and we don't want them to and some sometimes teachers are even like, I kind of want them to be able to interrupt the lesson with a with a good comment, but not a bad comment. You gotta think through like, what does that actually look like? Are there times when I need them to be absolutely silent? Are there times when it's more free for them and I wanna have discussions? Like there's no right and wrong way to structure your classroom, but you gotta think that ahead of time because if you don't if you're not really clear on what do I actually want this to look like.

Then it's very hard to enforce something that you don't even know what

it is. We'll talk about raising expectations in a minute, but would you add anything to that, Beki, first?

Beki Jones (03:01)

No, I think that that's just really key. Although I would say for day one, recognize you're not gonna get through your entire list of expectations and that's okay. So really key in on what is most important for me to do on day one that will make day two that much easier.

Linda Kardamis (03:18)

Yes, that is so true. I think it's important before you get to day one to think through as many expectations as you possibly can. But that's a really good point. Don't try to I've seen that mistake where teachers on day one try to teach every single expectation and th that at some point they're going in one year. That's just too much to remember. It's just too much. So yes, you need to you need to have all them ready, but you're only gonna teach like the ones they need right away on day one. The rest will come.

as you kind of get to them.

So you need to think through your expectations ahead of time. And then I also want to encourage you to ask, do I need to raise them? So one thing that I observed in my own classroom, in my own life, but

also in I was I was mentoring some teachers and in a costume observing. And I was observing how sometimes we like our put up with it meter is like too low. We like put up with way too much. We're just like, yeah.

The kids crawling on the desk, it's fine. You know, yes, I kind of expect the students to argue with me. That's what they do. Like, and we're just kind of like, yeah, what am I supposed to do? Like, that's what they do. And I want to encourage you, like, that doesn't have to be what they do. like if we put up with something, it is 100% gonna happen. If we say no, that's not how it's gonna go.

Doesn't mean it's never gonna happen, but if we're if that's where we set the line and we're dealing with it, it is gonna happen way, way less because that's the expectation that we're setting. So I want to encourage you to ask yourself, where do I need to raise the bar? Where do I need to kind of, you know, pull myself up and say, I'm not gonna put up with this anymore. This is actually not okay. And don't fall into the trap of thinking, well, kids these days just can't. Kids can do a lot. A lot of it stems from our own expectations that they can't. And so

Why would they if we don't if we let them, right? So really thinking through where do I need to raise my expectations? And if you're not sure what's reasonable, ask around. Ask your admin,

ask the other teachers, hey, do you let your kids do this? Do your kids do that? You know, they may you know, if if you're getting a lot of no, I don't let them do that, you know, that that will help you realize, okay, I I this is not an unreasonable expectation.

Beki Jones (05:28)

And sometimes teachers also fall into the trap of the idea that, yes, that will be my expectation. But on day one, it's just going to be a little more loose and

a little more casual because I want the kids to have a great, exciting first day back to school and just make it all wonderful. And that actually is it's counterintuitive, but having solid, strong expectations where you're not being mean, but you're being firm and very consistent from the very beginning will help it so that in the future you can get a little.

looser and a little bit more open because the kids are so solid in those expectations. Whereas if on day one you have things pretty open and loose and you're not holding to super firm expectations, then on day two or whatever day you decide you're like, okay, now we're getting to work, the kids are like, wait, what? Their expectations are totally flipped because they thought they knew what the classroom environment would look like. And now you've changed that, but there's already an established norm. And so you really, really have to start with those

This is how the classroom is gonna run.

Fun and fair, but still firm, on that very, very first day.

Linda Kardamis (06:29)

Yes, I'm so glad you brought that up. That is so important from the moment they brought into your class. Yeah, you want to start off. If you're debating, always start off more strict. It's so easy to let off later and say, yeah, now you have more freedom. You know, now I'm gonna let you do this. It is an uphill battle to to take back structure and take back and kind of raise that, you know, things that they can't handle it. So I always say start off stricter if you're debating, and it's so easy to give them more freedom, more freedom later.

Such, such good advice. So, number one, clarify your expectations, raise them, especially on day one. Don't think you'll do it later. Number two, think through procedures. You want to ask yourself, are there any procedures that you need to change? Now, if you're a first-year teacher, you have or in a new school or a new grade, you have to think through like literally everything. Like just go through the day and think, what is literally everything? How are we gonna go to the bathroom? How are the students gonna enter the class? How are they gonna pass? You gotta think through it all.

But if you are in this a similar position as last year, you don't need to think through everything, obviously, but you do want to ask yourself, well, what didn't go well? Where was their chaos? Well, transitions were super chaotic. Okay, maybe I need a new procedure for transitions. Some people never even think of transitions as procedures, but they are. You know, I maybe I need to do it differently. You know, the snack. There was always this issue with everyone getting, you know, stuck over here. Okay, how can I do that differently? So just identifying where are the where are the problems and then

Correcting them.

Beki Jones (07:59)

That is one of the things that I love so much about our Classroom Management 101 template. Like we have all of the procedures listed out that we could think of. And there, if there are more that you think of, you can always email us, we can add to it. But we have them all listed. But the best part, we have lists of ideas from expert teachers. So you can just copy and paste and tweak. And so sometimes with a plan, you're like,

There are too many things and it's all blank. Where on earth do I start? And so our classroom management template, my goodness, it makes it so much more manageable to think through all of those procedures and just beg, borrow, and steal, as is the teacher motto, from others who've done it well and succeeded in the past and then make it your own. It's just it's so much easier that way. It's wonderful.

Linda Kardamis (08:42)

Yeah, I'm so glad you brought that up. And that's what we what we really wanted to do with those templates is we think it's important to have ideas because you're staring at a blank sheet, it's it's just hard. You're just like, I don't know what I should do. this is why I came for help in the first place, right? But then we also like if if I just go to you and say this is how you should do it, that'll work.

Like a certain percentage of the time, but there's a certain percentage that you'll be like, Well, I don't want to do it that way. That doesn't make sense to me. That doesn't fit what I'm trying to do. And so it's really important that you have multiple ideas to choose from, but that you pick the one that you feel aligned with. Yes, I feel like this is gonna work well in my class. And yeah, we do it with procedures, we also do it with expectations, consequences, responses. We we do it with all those areas because I think that's that's so important.

06:59 Establishing Classroom Procedures

So, yeah, if you join us in Classroom Management 101, we've kind of got it all a little shortcut for you. So you can get more info there at [teach4theheart.com/ CM101](https://teach4theheart.com/CM101). but if not, you can you can make your own list and think through it on your own and kind of end in a similar spot. It's also really important with procedures that you teach them. You're not just kind of like, I just told them and hopefully they're gonna do it. we're actually gonna talk to in our free training tonight.

About we're going to teach you our four steps for teaching procedures. So if you aren't familiar with those, that just that is worth the cost of admission, which is nothing, to our training tonight. so [teachwithheart.com / training](https://teachwithheart.com/training). If you're listening live, join us tonight. If you're listening later, you can still sign up. There we will hopefully have the replay up there and you can listen to that. because that's another important piece that we don't have time to go into right now.

Beki Jones (10:13)
I will say though,

really quickly, one of my favorite ways to make sure that I do all those things, teach the procedures, and personally keep track of it. I have Google Slides set up for each of my classes for the beginning of the year. And so I use those to teach. And so there's visuals, the kids walk through the text with me, we talk about it, we talk about all the whys. And so that is one of my favorite ways to make sure that at the beginning of the year, I'm remembering all the things. And we don't just sit and go through the slides all at one time.

Linda Kardamis (10:38)
That

Beki Jones (10:40)
But I have them and then I can check them off as we go through to make sure that I hit all of the ones that

were important enough to make a slide for.

10:47 Responding to Misbehavior

Linda Kardamis (10:47)

I love that. That's such a good idea.

So number one, clarify expectations and raise them. Number two, think through the procedures, right? What might need to change. number three, planning how you'll respond to misbehavior. Okay, so we talked about where is the line, but then what happens when students go over the line? If we don't know, yeah, when you know, when students just take something so simple, talking when they're not supposed to, right?

If we're like, yeah, what are you gonna do when students are talking? We're like, maybe I'll just tell them to stop talking? I don't know. Like, then that's what are you gonna do in the day? Like, right? So if we don't have a good plan and something that we feel like we can stick to and we feel like is aligned and makes sense and is fair and is age appropriate, then we're we're gonna get in a in a pickle pretty quickly. because students are gonna talk.

When they're not supposed to. And if nothing happens, if we don't correct, if if like nothing, nothing happens at all, it's just gonna grow and grow and grow and grow. And that's true of all behaviors. It's not just true of talking, but that's just that's the one that's probably gonna come up like within the first half hour of students stepping into your class. So you gotta think that through. How am I gonna handle that? And once again, that's something that we're talking a little bit about tonight in the free training. We also go into it in great detail, like we just talked about with the templates in Classroom Management 101, but just

Pre-thinking, pre-preparing makes such a difference. Beki, I'm interested in some of your experience, but I know for myself, my first year, I knew what I didn't want to do. I was, I knew I didn't want to give a detention for talking. that's what they had done at like the school I did my pre-service teaching in. I was like, no, I don't want to do that. But I hadn't thought about what I was gonna do instead. And so I just like, I just kind of like gave a look and like hoped that was enough. And it was actually enough for like day one, day two, day three, but by week seven, it was not.

I was in hot water, so I had to dig myself out of a hole.

Beki Jones (13:38)

And when you don't pre-think it, like we find ourselves reacting as opposed to responding. And that just that raises the emotional difficulty. It usually means you're making a worse decision than you'd like to. We often find ourselves relying more on ourselves than on God's guidance in those situations because our emotions are so heightened and we're stressed. Like, this kid isn't doing what I told him to. What now? And so it's just there's not that you'll never make a mistake when you have a plan, but there's just so much good in being able to.

Linda Kardamis (13:42)

Yes.

Beki Jones (14:08)

Think back about what your plan is in a split second and respond in the way that you desired to, when you were thinking calmly and clearly, as opposed to this kid just out and out refused, what now? And reacting in that way can really make things worse as opposed to helping your classroom run more smoothly and calmly.

Linda Kardamis (14:26)

Yes, exactly. That's that's so well said. So thinking through how you'll respond to misbehavior. Like I said, if you join us in Classy Manager One O one, we have it all listed out. We'll walk you through the whole thing. But if you're not able to join us in Classy Manager 101, I would just make a list of like what are the common misbehaviors I see in my class and then just just start writing down what what am I gonna do? What did I do in the past? Do I like it? Do I wanna change it? and just kind of go through and and make a plan it make a it'll you will feel so much more confident.

Walking in there. And that also makes a really big difference. Just that confidence is super intangible. It's sending all the right signals. So those are some ways to pre-plan your classroom management, which is so important. I haven't even talked about your content yet because I think this is more important than what you actually teach on day one. But let's take just a moment to talk about planning your content.

15:17 Planning Content for Day One

Of the opinion, if you can teach at least a little bit the first day, that's great. Even in secondary, it in elementary, it's easier. In secondary, it is hard. You got 40 minutes. You got to teach at least some of your expectations, procedures, you know, get people in their seats. But I tried to at least teach teach for at least five to ten minutes, either whether it's an intro lesson or just sometimes I'd like to, we're just gonna do lesson one. They were always like, What? We're gonna we're doing lesson one. Yes, we're going for it. That I really liked doing that. I really felt like it set a good tone of like, hey, we're here to learn. but whatever you decide to do, I

The first day, my biggest advice is start with structure. Sometimes we wanna plan a really fun, elaborate activity for day one. But that is rarely a good idea. It is only a good idea if you are able to teach all of the procedures that are necessary for that activity to run smoothly. Okay. So if we're just gonna say you have this elaborate activity, you're like, all right, go.

It's probably gonna be chaos, and that's not the tone we're trying. Like you'll survive it, but like that's not the tone we're trying to set, right? We're we're telling students it's chaos. You know, we're just gonna kind of be be crazy and you're gonna be run around the room and I'm gonna let it happen because I didn't give you instructions. And like that's just not but all their students are picking up on so many intangibles that first day. That's a lot of what we're talking about here. We, you know, that's what's happening. They're picking up on these intangibles. Does my teacher know what they're doing?

Are they gonna hold me accountable? Do they take this seriously? Can I get away with like they're asking all these questions subconsciously? And that really elaborate activity that we didn't have time to actually teach them how to do, and we just let it happen is gonna do more harm than good. So it's better to just stick with more structured, and then, like Beki said, by week two or three, you'll be able to do all kinds of fun activities with them and be able to do them all year.

And so it's I I think personally it's worth it to start with much more structured things the first day and gradually introduce, you know, the more, the more complicated, you know, gradually introduce turn-in talks and then partner work

and then, you know, small groups and and just do it gradually as you're able to actually teach the procedure and the expectations around each of those formats.

Beki Jones (17:26)

Yeah, I think that's a great plan. coming from a language teaching background, we would always consider cognitive load and you have content and you have language. And for my class, language was the higher cognitive load. So my content focus was on review things mostly, things that they were already familiar with, because I wanted to push their language. Same idea on day one, you have content and you have procedure learning. And on day one, your focus needs to be super high on procedure learning, which means your content shouldn't be diving deep.

Into any of your lessons. It should be on the easier stuff, simpler lessons, more focused on what procedures do they have to learn? Because the brain can only handle so much, and you really want the brain to learn the procedures. Like that is key.

Linda Kardamis (18:10)

Yeah. Yeah. And you don't necessarily that's where I would really count the cost of trying to teach them, you know, these really complicated procedures, right? Starting with, okay, what are the how do we sit in our seats? How do we come into the classroom? How do we leave the classroom? You know, that's enough to learn. And maybe like maybe them the we can build on that then. They they can absorb more of that than if I'm trying to teach them all of this all at once. Of course it depends on the age of your students, if you've had them before, so many factors, but

Beki Jones (18:21)

It is a procedure.

Linda Kardamis (18:36)

Definitely keep that in mind and don't feel like you're failing if you're not the, you know, Pinterest perfect movie teacher doing all this on day one. You are setting yourself up to be able to do so much more the whole year. So my last recommendation, I would just say, there's so much more we could talk about and we will talk about more. But for today, the last thing is just don't forget to pray.

I think so many times we get into planning mode, like, I got it, I'm I'm going at it, and that's all good. God has given us creativity, but like invite him into your plans. not just when we get stuck, but in the beginning too, right? Just at God, I'm about to plan. Please give me wisdom, give me clarity. When you are stuck, maybe take a walk and pray, pray about it. I don't know what to do. I really don't, I'm really confused about this. And just inviting God into our day-to-day work, I think it's just an amazing opportunity, not just to deepen your relationship with God.

18:58 Inviting God into Your Planning

But for him to you, it's amazing like what he shows us and how he guides us when when we invite him in.

Beki Jones (19:33)

Yeah, and you're looking forward to being able to invite in new students, possibly re connect with older students who you've had and are having again, and just praying for his ability to help your classroom space and the way it's run and the calmness and the love that you're bringing, or excitement, like it doesn't have to always be calm, but but that that classroom space would speak love.

to your students, whether you're in a private school, whether you're in a public school, that his spirit would be there and working through you to love your students is just it's such a powerful thing that we are gifted to be able to do by God's strength and grace that we don't want to eliminate him from the planning process of it, which again, we we sometimes forget about it's so natural and so human to feel like we can just do this and power through, but we really need God's strength. so yeah.

Prayer, I think, is a huge part that we need to remember.

Linda Kardamis (20:27)

Yeah, absolutely.

So those of you that are listening, I mentioned a few resources. We talked about Classroom Manager 101. That's a great resource. we also have our back to school classroom management and motivation training tonight. So [teach4theheart.com / training](https://teach4theheart.com/training). if you want to sign up for that or if you're listening later, you can go over and catch the replay. We're also doing something brand new next, I believe next week. we are doing a workshop just for our Teach 4 the Heart Plus members. If you're a Teach 4 the Heart,

Plus member, you are not gonna wanna miss this. And if you're not, you might want to sign up so that you can join us. it's called day one success plan. And we're gonna kind of sit down and think through together some of these things we've talked about and put put put together a plan for how we're gonna run day one.

So if that's something you're interested in, if you're a Teach 4 the Heart Plus member, just check your account. All the information will be there. If you're like, I want to join, I think we have a special deal that you can join this month and join an in for us. So go to teach4theheart.com/ day one and we can get the info and join us for that special workshop. Well, thank you guys so much for being with us. This episode is 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.

Thanks so much for being with us. I 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 for the heart.