

## Episode 395: How to Set the Right Tone from Day One

### 00:00 Setting the Tone for the First Day of School

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

The first day of school is vital for setting the right tone. Let's talk about how to do that. 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,

Ashly joins us again to talk about this important topic. Ashly thanks for joining us.

Ashly Hilst (00:19)

Thanks so much.

Linda Kardamis (00:21)

So, for those of that don't know, Ashly is one of our Teach 4 the Heart Plus mentors, and she's also one of our team members. She writes emails and also answers a lot of your questions with our customer service team. And today we're talking about preparing for the first day of school. And I will say this first: if you did not yet catch episode 393, that's the episode from two weeks ago.

That is kind of important background to this episode. So you might want to maybe pause this one, go listen to that one and come back because we talked there about how important it is to be prepared. We talked about having a plan in place for what are your expectations, getting really clear on what to expect from your students and where the line is. We talked about

Planning your procedures so you know what they are. We talked about planning how you're gonna respond to misbehavior. So we're kind of coming into this episode, assuming you've already spent the time thinking through and you know what, you know your plans, where your lines are, what you're gonna do. And now we just need to talk about like how to execute that plan on day one. so if you haven't listened to that, highly recommend going back there because this first day matters so much. When those students come into your room.

And they see you for the first time, or if you've had them in past, it's still really important. The first time this year, what you do in those first moments, first day, first week, it is really going to set the tone that you're either gonna and it's either gonna be a tone that you're like, yes, let's keep this going, or that you have to fight back against. and so it's just so, so important. Ashly what what have you observed in that just importance of that first day or two of school?

## 02:01 The Importance of First Impressions

Ashly Hilst (02:01)

The first day of school is so exciting. I don't know, I always have nerves for the first day of school. It doesn't matter. I've been teaching nine years. I'm still like, my gosh, it's the first day of school. The kids have nerves. They either haven't seen each other all summer, and they're coming back to see a bunch of friends, or maybe they're new to the school, or so there's just a lot of energy, a lot of excitement, and then there's so much to do. And so I know for me it can be really hard to like, how do I fit it all in? And then we have all sat in that class where you just read the syllabus and it's

So boring, and you're just like, I just want to get you through the syllabus so I can teach the content. And I've tried that myself, let me tell you, it doesn't end well. So lots of excitement, super important though, because the kids are coming in with a question. And the question is, who are you? What do you expect from me? And what are you gonna do if I don't do what you expect?

and it's it's a very subconscious question, but they wanna know. And that's like how we all are. Imagine going to a staff meeting, your first staff meeting at a new school. You're gonna walk in and you're gonna be like, Who are you? What are your expectations of me? How are you gonna hold me accountable? And so reasonable questions. and the better

we answer those the first day of school, the stronger we will be throughout the year.

Linda Kardamis (03:11)

Yes, that's exactly it, right? They're they're asking and it doesn't matter if they're in kindergarten, there's they're still it's subconscious, they are wondering the same thing. And we answer that both in what we say explicitly, but also in the signals we send with our body language, how we approach day one. And I think those are the pieces we sometimes forget to pay attention to. And that's kind of some of what we wanna wanna wanna tie.

talk about today so that we're sending signals that say the right things, right? That say, we're gonna learn together. I'm gonna hold you accountable when you

Ashly Hilst (03:43)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (03:44)

don't. What I say matters. You know, we're gonna actually follow instructions. We wanna send those signals. We don't want to send signals that say, yeah, you can kind of get away with stuff. I'm really unconfident and I don't really know what I'm doing. I I really and I'm unsure. Yeah, I don't really I'm not really gonna make you do what I say. I just kind of hope you do. Like we don't, those are not the

signals we want to send.

#### **04:04 Key Attitudes for a Successful Start**

Ashly Hilst (04:04)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (05:03)

let's talk a little bit about a few different things. Let's talk first of all about some general attitudes we wanna have that that stuff set the right tone. So I just wrote down like five quick things for just having the right demeanor and right approach to set the right tone. I said, first of all, be organized. It's so important to be organized because if you are just kind of like all over the place on day one, students are gonna pick up on that and be like, I don't know if she knows what she's doing. So you wanna be

I'll be extra organized on day one, because once again, your first impression, you only get one chance of that. Number two, you want be friendly, right? I do not believe in don't smile till Christmas. Smile, be very friendly, be welcoming. Number three, be confident. If you like not know what you're doing, this is the time to fake confidence. Just fake it, practice ahead of time if you need to, like put on that confidence. It's important that really, that really matters when they see you.

number four, don't be a pushover. We'll talk about a little later about having to deal with issues. You're being friendly does not mean you're a pushover. If this is what you're doing, like be ready to stand your ground, just be ready to insist. No, you can't, no, you can't sit on the desk. No, you know, just just be ready to not be a pushover. And then number five, start with structure, not chaos. I'm gonna come back to that one. That's a kind of its whole own thing. Ashly, what would you maybe add to the list or or thoughts around these things?

Ashly Hilst (06:26)

I think that the confidence piece is super important. And I would say one of the best things you this sounds so random, but one of the best things you can do for the first day of school is dress nice. Like if

Linda Kardamis (06:36)

Mm.

Ashly Hilst (06:37)

you wear like, and I know that maybe sounds silly or shallow, but it's not. If you wear a really nice like, you know, skirt and you know, blouse, or like, you know, if you're a guy and you wear like, you know, slacks and like a

Really nice button-up shirt, maybe even a tie. Like it doesn't mean that you have to dress that way the rest of the year, but there's something about saying, I am a professional. I'm going to dress

professional. And then that helps you act that way. Even if so that's kind of my tip. If you're like, but I'm not confident, dress like it. Pretend you're

Linda Kardamis (07:05)

Hmm.

Ashly Hilst (07:06)

confident. Like put on those clothes. And kids respond to it. they respond, I've I've noticed it. It's kind of crazy. They respond when you come in as a professional. They're like, I've got to listen to this person. So

Linda Kardamis (07:18)

Yeah, that's really, really good advice. I think especially the older your students are, the younger you are. It can make an even bigger difference, right?

Ashly Hilst (07:22)

Mm-hmm. Yes, yes.

Linda Kardamis (07:26)

To just set yourself apart. Yeah. And that those subconscious cues that they're picking up on. I love that idea of just just stepping it up a notch for the first couple of days. And then, like you said,

Ashly Hilst (07:33)

Mm-hmm. Yep.

Linda Kardamis (07:35)

you're not obligating yourself to wear that the entire year. I think that's really smart.

### **07:39 Teaching Procedures and Expectations**

Ashly Hilst (07:39)

I

think also too, like someone told me a long time ago, like greet every student at the door on the first day, or something similar. I mean, it doesn't have to be at the door, but I think that's also so important because it you are both being welcoming and doing that, but then you're also like, This is my room. I'm welcoming you into it. So there's an element of that, like, I'm I'm so excited to have you here and I am welcoming you into my space and I'm going to hold you accountable to the expectations within my space. So even that is powerful with like starting to build relationships and rapport and

basically running the room right from the beginning.

Linda Kardamis (08:11)

Right, because we want students to pick up very quickly that we love them and we care for them. We're not this dictator just like

Ashly Hilst (08:16)

Yeah. Mm mm.

Linda Kardamis (08:17)

making their lives miserable, but

yet we are gonna hold them accountable. And when that's together, that's really powerful. And they pick up on that and they're like, okay, this teacher's like, they're on it, but it's this gonna be a pretty good year. Like and it cuts down on a lot of issues. So let's talk about a key piece with this, which I really believe how we teach procedures and expectations can be hugely helpful with this.

In particular, procedures. So I think procedures is one of those places where those signals are going without us even realizing it. Because if we tell students, okay, this is the procedure, for example, like this is the procedure for passing in papers, right? You just gave them their get to know you activity and you're collecting it. You say, This is how we pass in papers. And then the students like kind of do it, but they don't really, you know, it's like they're all a mess and let's like they done they wouldn't really do what you just said. And you just move on, you are sending signals. I'm not actually gonna make, you know, it

But I say doesn't actually matter. We're not gonna take things seriously. Like you're you didn't mean to, you're just like, this isn't a big deal, we're moving on. But like everything needs to be a big deal on day one

Ashly Hilst (09:19)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (09:20)

of school. so there's a four step process we recommend for teaching procedures. And I recommend this for like, like just invest the time, K through 12, it's worth it. For every single procedure you have to teach, go through these four steps. It's investing time now, you'll save, you'll make it, you'll

Ashly Hilst (09:37)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (09:37)

catch it all back up later.

So step one is to teach the procedure. This includes modeling, explaining, just whatever you need to do to make it very clear this is the expectation. Number two, practice it. Don't teach that's what Ashly said, don't go through a million procedures. Like if you're not gonna practice it, save teaching it until

you're ready to practice it. Like, so I either do it the first time I'm teaching it or something like my start of class procedure, I will teach it and be like, we're gonna practice it. Let's, everyone's gonna go out and we're gonna, we're gonna practice it. Cause if they don't practice it,

They're not gonna remember. So you have them practice it. Number three, you give feedback. So you tell them what they did well, what they didn't do well. if you once again, so so with the passing in papers example, you would say, okay, we just passed in the papers, but I noticed that, you know, half of these were the wrong way and you forgot to wait for the stack and like point out what didn't go well. And then this is one is optional depending on how it went. If necessary, redo it.

And that is so powerful because you're saying with your actions, not your words, that we are gonna do this right. So you're saying, okay, I'm gonna pass the papers back out and we're gonna try this again. That really, really says something. so as necessary redo, you can have the whole class redo it or you can have just one student. So if we're practicing coming into class and a student runs into class, you can have him go out and come back.

Ashly Hilst (10:59)

Yeah, so

Linda Kardamis (11:00)

That's really powerful. I'll just give one tip with this. Sometimes I get the question: how many times do I have them redo it? My

Ashly Hilst (11:06)

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (11:07)

recommendation is once. Okay. If have them redo it once. If it doesn't go well that time, give the feedback again and say, we'll practice this again tomorrow or later today. Then that next time you might have to practice it twice. Like, so does that make sense? But don't, don't get if you get in practicing it three, four, five times, you're now in a battle of wills and you are losing your.

confidence in your authority. So just redo

Ashly Hilst (11:30)

Yes. Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (11:32)

it once and then say, We'll keep working on this. That's my recommendation. Ashly any advice or thoughts on teaching procedures? Okay.

Ashly Hilst (11:39)

So I've got a question for you that we get kind of

a lot. So you said, like, you know, don't teach all the teeth all the procedures on the first day. I've done that. It's the worst idea.

the kids, they forget

### **11:49 Managing Classroom Behavior from Day One**

Linda Kardamis (11:49)  
It's bad for everybody.

Ashly Hilst (11:51)  
everything. You're bored out of your mind. They're bored out of their mind. You forget like it's just terrible. Don't do that. So everybody knows that. But a lot of times we tell teachers, like, okay, so just teach the procedure the first time you're doing X, the first time you're lining up in the

Linda Kardamis (12:04)  
Mm-hmm.

Ashly Hilst (12:05)  
hallway.

The first time you're doing group work, the first time teach the procedure then. Well, what happens if it's the first day of school and you're doing five or six new things? That's so many procedures to teach. What would you tell a teacher in that situation? Does she have to teach all five of them? Like that's gonna take a lot of time. Like, what would you tell a teacher for that?

Linda Kardamis (12:21)  
Yes. So I would recommend if you yes, teaching every procedure the first time you need it. Because other if you do something without teaching the procedure, it's gonna be chaos, right? So you're

Ashly Hilst (12:31)  
Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (12:32)  
you're losing all that, that's so I would, but I also would recommend not like can you save some of that stuff for the next day? So really

Ashly Hilst (12:41)  
Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (12:41)

paring it down to what do I need to teach on day one? And that's actually what I was gonna talk about next is starting with structure.

A lot of times we're like, I wanna do this really fun thing on day one. So we're gonna do groups and pair work and we're gonna do I just I would save that for this very reason, right? If you try to do that without teaching all the five procedures needed to do that well, it's not gonna go well, right? And that's not the tone you wanna set on day one. So I would keep things honestly, if you just sit in desks and they look at you and you just do notes and like that's fine for day one.

Day two, you can introduce, you know, the payer share. And day three, you can introduce the small groups. And day four, you know, get what I'm saying? Like you can I would recommend building it up gradually. But yeah, elementary teachers in particular, you're gonna have to teach a lot of procedures because you're there the whole day, you've got a lot you're going. But yeah, in high school, you can maybe try to stick it to start a class procedure, passing in papers, end of class procedure, maybe one more. Like I would just try to keep it to just a few. Does that make sense?

Ashly Hilst (13:38)

Yeah, no, that totally makes sense and it's really helpful. And I'm totally guilty of that. I want to do all the fun things, every fun thing I've ever thought of in the first day.

Linda Kardamis (13:47)

Yeah. I mean obviously you want you want the first day to be interesting, but but yeah, you have I think if we start off with structure, we'll be able to do more fun things the rest of the year than if we try to do too much too soon. So

Ashly Hilst (13:57)

Mm-hmm. Yeah. And

it does help like with the the first day like nerves and energy. Like I work at a school where all the kids know each other. So like usually public school teachers, my experience in public school was first days crickets. They're quiet.

Linda Kardamis (14:11)

Mm.

Ashly Hilst (14:11)

You're you're you're trying to draw them out, you're trying to get to know them. Opposite for my school. It is chaos. It is like a family reunion. Everyone is talking, nobody will shut up. Like it's so like one of the procedures I will teach is let's talk about volume and when you're allowed to talk and when you're not. Because I didn't just

'Cause that's just my school,

Linda Kardamis (14:27)

Yes.

Ashly Hilst (14:28)

so

Linda Kardamis (14:29)

Yeah. Which which actually I'm so glad you brought that up because I almost forgot to talk about teaching expectations. So procedures and expectations ki kind of cross over, but they're kind of I like to think of them distinctly. A procedure is more about something we have to do. How do

Ashly Hilst (14:42)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (14:42)

I come into class? How do I pass it? How do I do something? Expectations are a little bit more around how we behave, right? So what you were saying, like, what what does volume level look like? When am I allowed to talk? You know, can I you know all these different things.

So those I you it's a similar thing, I think, where, but it's a little bit different. Because on one hand, well, all the expectations exist on day one. You can't be like, well, the rules around being respectful don't exist till day five. so

Ashly Hilst (15:08)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (15:08)

everything exists, but you cannot afford to take the time to talk through everything. Like every it would that's not the best way to do it. So yeah, I would normally pick like what do they really need, like basically what do I want to be able to enforce right away. So I would teach my talking system.

Ashly Hilst (15:21)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (15:24)

you know, how am I gonna hold how are we gonna deal with just blurting and talking? I would teach that. Or like you said, you would do volume levels. Like you need something right away. That's almost like the first thing I would teach. so that we have that and we and I can then then enforce it. but yeah, very similarly, you know, if you can practice that with them, would let's practice the level one volume, let's practice the level two volume. Like that's really valuable. It really helps cement it.

and it allows you to kind of give them immediate feedback and show them, Yeah, I'm not just saying this, like I actually mean

Ashly Hilst (15:54)

The man.

Linda Kardamis (15:54)

it. And that can be can be really valuable.

### **15:49 Creating a Positive Classroom Culture**

So as we teach these procedures, as we teach these expectations, we also need to be ready to deal with the first issues. Okay.

Ashly Hilst (16:04)

Mm.

Linda Kardamis (16:04)

There is going to be that first student who does what you just said not to do, right? That first student who's, and it kind of depends where you're drawing the line, but like wherever you draw the line, the first student that crosses it, okay? And I don't wanna go too much back, but go back and listen to episode 393. Cause like just for talking, for example.

Like you might not want no talking, right? You might want want to allow some level of interaction, but you need to know where that line is and your students need to know where that line is. And you need to be ready the first time a student's past that line, you need to be ready to do something. Cause if you don't, then another student's gonna come and then another it it's gonna, you know, it's gonna snowball very, very, very quickly. So this is why we like to recommend having a classroom management plan. You're not coming up with something on the spot.

You're not bringing a crazy hammer down and making them write 8,000 sentences that night because I got a sudden example. All you need to do is just follow your plan. Like, what is your plan for when students cross this line? I'm just gonna do it the first time. I'm not gonna say, well, it's day one. We'll start it on day. No, just follow the plan, do what you were gonna do, just be ready to do it and then do it. It's very simple. For some of us like me, harder to actually do. And my heart rate gets all up, and I'm like, I don't want

Ashly Hilst (17:16)

Mhmm

Linda Kardamis (17:18)

Do it. But do we just do it? We hit the first one. We hit the second one. But like I'm coming in with this vigilance of like, I'm looking for that first one. I'm ready for it. And I know that this is one of the important things I need to do the first day or two of school. and sometimes in secondary, it actually doesn't happen the first day because everyone's, it's all new, and no one knows, you know, it might be

day two or three, but you gotta be ready because depending on the group, it could happen. And the first one, how you respond to the first one.

drastically impacts whether you have ten more happening very quickly or whether it's like, okay. And and it c stays very manageable.

Ashly Hilst (17:56)

Well, and I think

too the the one thing we because I'm the same way. Like I don't love that type of like confrontation thing. But A, having the plan takes like confrontation out because it's not an emotional reaction. It's like a plan. It's like I said if X happens, I'm gonna do Y. So there's no emo there's no chance for us to get emotionally like wrapped up in it. or less of a chance, I should say. and then also what we don't realize is in that moment when we're dealing with that one student and we're like, my gosh, I kind of just wanted to ignore it.

You are currently teaching every other student in the room what not to do and what will happen if they do it. So it's so powerful because they are consciously or unconsciously observing. And it's again, think about it like us. Like if you go into a staff meeting and everybody's allowed to chit chat, then you chit chat and that becomes the norm. If you go into a staff meeting and the expectation is that you are, you know, sitting quietly and listening and you're not, then that becomes the norm. And so you're setting that baseline, that norm for more than just that one student. so

That that's like that's the thing that keeps me like when I know I'm looking for that one thing and it happens and there's a part of me that's like, but like it could be like, great, now is a chance for me to get out in front of a ton of other problems. I'm actually really glad Bobby did that. Bobby is saving me so much work down the road. Like probably 10 infractions won't happen because of what Bobby just did.

Linda Kardamis (19:13)

Yeah. Yeah, that's so true. And I love that example you gave of the of the staff meeting, right? And you know that like different different cultures of different meetings, jobs, places, like you can think the culture is, and that's what you're setting. You are setting your classroom culture on day one, whether you want to or not. And so yeah, what we what we let go becomes what is allowed, right? And so if we're if we're just like, yeah, the students are sitting on the desks.

I guess I guess it's fine. Like if we're just like, I guess if we just let stuff go, that be quickly becomes the norm, or we have to fight a big battle to get it back. But on day one, I I don't wanna say it's easy because it's still hard and depending on the situation, it c can be hard. But it's way easier to just just nip stuff. Like you can nip a lot in the bud. You can really just like set a culture that can you can set a culture that's vastly different than what your class was last year.

Even with the same kids, I've been there where it's like, yeah, I well, way too much go last year. I got the same kids, but it's like, well, you're in eighth grade now, so we're gonna be different.

Ashly Hilst (20:14)

Yeah, you know.

Linda Kardamis (20:15)

And you can just take this huge leap. So I guess I just want to encourage you, if you're like, I don't want it to be like last year, be ready on day one and make it different. You can make it different. I mean it you'll have different groups. I'm sure there'll be a you know, different new challenges, but start with that expectation, start with those expectations of like, no, this is how we're gonna do it, and do your best.

best to stick with that. And then and then you can kind of settle in and see, you know, see where things land. But I think that's I think that's so key.

## **20:43 Final Thoughts and Encouragement**

So my final advice is to pray. this is not just tacked on at the end. This is really, really vital. And two things I recommend praying for is first of all, pray for your about your first day. Anything you're scared about, nervous about, pray about it. Ask God to help you, ask God to be with you, ask him to give you wisdom and kindness and love as you correct, all those things. And then also pray for your students. That can be so powerful to just look at a roster and just be praying over these.

names and students, that's gonna give you a different for first of all, God answers those prayers. And secondly, it's gonna give you, it's gonna change your heart towards your students before you even

Ashly Hilst (21:16)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (21:17)

see them. And I think that's that's so gonna be so invaluable. And that's another intangible that's just gonna gonna shine through to them and they're gonna see. Ashly what would you add as we wrap this episode up?

Ashly Hilst (21:27)

Just add, make a plan that feels like you that you're going to stick with. and I know like the last thing you probably want to do with your summer is sit down and write, you know, write down a plan. But the difference in how you will feel on day one when you have that plan is extraordinary. And the difference will show. Kind of like you said, all those intangibles, all those messages we're sending, like being confident. If you know how you're gonna respond because you have a plan, not just because you have a vague general idea of I'm not gonna put up with talking anymore.

That's not a plan. That is a great attitude. It is not a plan. Yeah. Versa, yeah. And then you're

gonna get frustrated and you're gonna get emotional. and so so the first thing I would just say is just I know that I know that you hear that and you want to be like, but is there like another option that doesn't involve me having but there I mean, maybe if you think of it, let us know, please. But this it works for teachers. It just works. So make a plan, have a plan, write it down, don't just have it in your head. And then the second thing is.

Look at it with enthusiasm. The first day of school is a chance to like set set the culture, like you said, set the tone for the year. Meet these new people who are maybe new to you or maybe you're just like, my gosh, you grew up so much over the summer. Like the first day of school, let yourself enjoy and revel in that first day of school energy and that first day of school things. And rather than looking at it as like, my gosh, I've gotta get this right, I've gotta nail this, gotta make sure, I've gotta respond exactly according to my plan. Like

Remember that like you're human, they're human and have fun with it. Like have fun. Show up, be a human with them. and you will find that at the end of that day, you're you're full of joy and you'll be like, I love my job. So

Linda Kardamis (23:04)

That's great. Yes, yes. This could feel very heavy and it shouldn't, right? It should be, it should be exciting. It should be fun. I love that. And yes, Ashley's so right about the classroom management plan. And if you say, Man, I I need help with that, do you have a shortcut? Like we do have a shortcut in classroom management 101. We have all the templates, like we have all the areas there. And then we have copy and paste idea banks where you can go and you can see, okay, here's three different ways I could respond to this. Which one do I resonate? Because like you said, you have to feel confident in the your plan or

Or you won't follow it. It won't work. So I I like this one, but I want to tweak this. So it's it's it's made. We try to make it as be able to get through it and actually get a plan, you know, as quickly and efficiently as possible. So yeah,

if you go to [teach4theheart.com](https://teach4theheart.com) / CM101, use the code podcast. I think that has some type of discount attached to it. or if you haven't watched our back to school training replay, that also will kind of give you a little bit more idea about like how all this works. So you can go to

[teach4theheart.com](https://teach4theheart.com) / training. and that will give you that has our free back to school classroom management and motivation training. That's a good place to start too.

Well, thank you guys so much. I hope you enjoyed this episode and we wish you the very best for your first day of school. that's coming up probably before you know it. 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. We do look forward to

To being 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.