

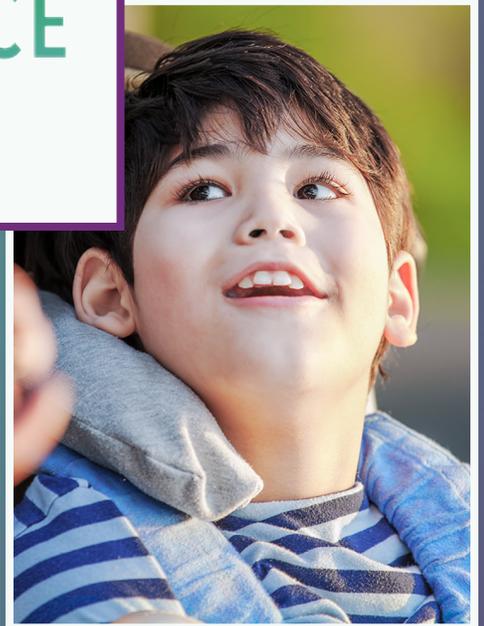


Creating  
**A TRUSTED SPACE**  
In Five Days



*SEL resource for schools to support students through emotional stressors and trauma recovery using:*

**NOTICE. CHOOSE. ACT.®**



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# Building Your SEL Muscles

5 Critical Muscles that will change your life both in and out of the classroom.  
Create trusting relationships while maintaining your authority and credibility!

- 1.** **Quit Taking It Personal (QTIP)**  
Offering the Benefit of the Doubt
- 2.** **Communicating With I-Statements**  
During Victories, Challenges, and Redirects
- 3.** **Ask vs Tell**  
Recognize and Ask for What You Need, Rather than Tell What's Wrong
- 4.** **Storytelling**  
Tell Stories to Relate Feelings, Rather than Make A Point
- 5.** **Walk The Talk**  
Model In Words, Actions, and Attitudes what You Expect From Them





# MUSCLE #1

## Quit Taking It Personal (QTIP)

### Offering the Benefit of the Doubt

Many people have heard the acronym *QTIP*, which stands for, **Quit Taking It Personally**. The idea of not taking things personally is often embraced, whereas the reality of applying it in real time it is often more difficult. Adults who practice *QTIP* are aware of their triggers, have and use self management tools to calm themselves down when needed, and have an overall positive view of people. *QTIP* operators are fabulous models for students.

In the classroom, there are so many things that happen on a daily basis that can be triggering, irritating, or offensive. Students, regardless of age, have a keen ability to get right into our hearts and say and do things that hurt. When this happens, we often frame it in our mind that they are doing something **to** us and we **react** from that thought. Our little voice engages in internal talk that can include name calling, judgement, and shaming. Sometimes the internal little voice erupts in external vocalization of our thoughts and our hurt. In both cases, no one wins. Even when we keep it in our minds our actions and attitudes cannot help but reflect our feelings. As good as we think we are at hiding it from our students, they are reading us.

**To keep your joy, sanity, and balance, reframe every personalization that feels bad to this:**

*"This student (colleague, parent, friend, spouse), is going through something that I do not understand. What just happened, what was said, is a reflection of their process - not mine. This is not about me. What just happened felt bad and I can share calmly what I am feeling while listening openly and creatively for what they need."*

*"It is not about me, it is a statement about what they need rather than a personal attack against me." Repeat - and Repeat Again!*

QTIP and Benefit of the Doubt are key practices to offer yourself and others. They are key concepts to teach and practice with your students, everyday. It is a way of operating, a way of thinking, and a way of being that will cultivate trusting relationships in your classroom and beyond.

## Quit Taking It Personal (QTIP)

An example of Benefit of the Doubt to model and practice responding to things that feel bad:

A student refuses to engage in work and you instantly feel defied and disrespected.

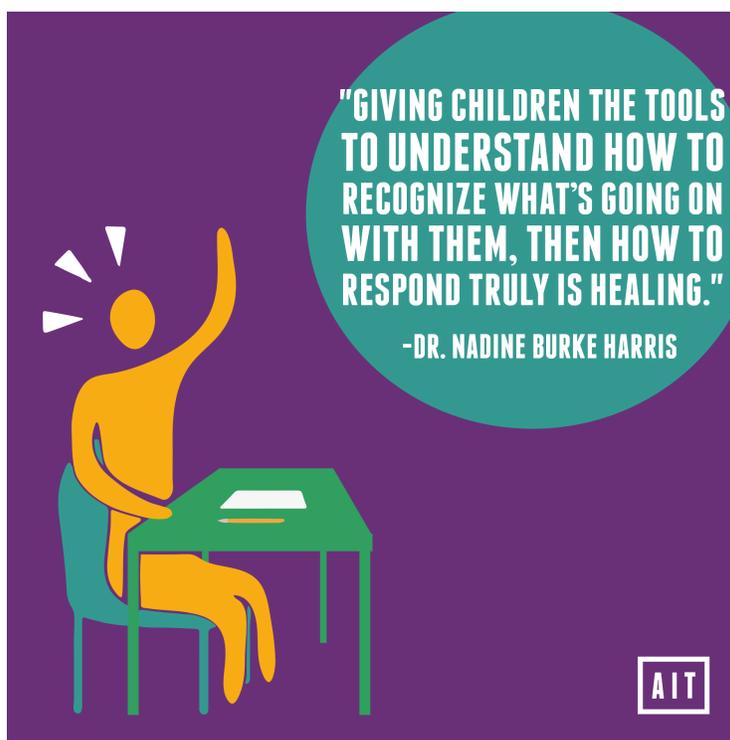
Try thinking beyond these assumptions of personal attack and lean into a new paradigm of, "it's not personal, I will be honest, I will give benefit of the doubt."

*"I see that you didn't complete your work. I am experiencing uncertainty on how to support you and I am concerned about you. What do you need from me? I am happy to work with you in exploring ways that you can experience success in learning."*

Student shrugs off your offer to support, saying, *"I don't care, it doesn't matter."*

Breathe - and consider saying, *"I do not know what you are experiencing right now and I want you to know that I'll support you enough for both of us until you're ready to join me."*

Release attachment to their response. Know that you just created a safe place for this student and right now, above all else, that is what was needed.





# MUSCLE #2



## Using I-Statements to Communicate During Victories, Challenges, and Redirects

When communicating with your students, notice how you approach them. Very often we speak to students, and others, from starters such as *you* or *they*. When we do this, we are often wagging a pointed finger at others - and as soon as that happens, they become instantly defensive.

Think of how you react to people when they start with, "YOU:"

- "You made me feel \_\_\_\_."
- "Because you are doing \_\_\_\_, you are making me do \_\_\_\_."
- "When you do this you make me \_\_\_\_."
- "If you didn't do \_\_\_\_, I wouldn't have done \_\_\_\_."

This is a common communication pattern for both youth and adults. The impact of it is that we relegate our power to others by blaming them for our words and actions. We also close down relationships because we instantly create defensiveness, which too often turns to a power struggle.

When we speak from "I" or "We", we create an opening for others to hear us, and to be willing to engage in conversation and problem solving. We offer opportunities for them to relate to us and grow empathy and compassion.

It is helpful to pay attention and purposefully consider how to use an I-Statement before simply reacting to something. Our old habits will always surface unless we specifically remember to do otherwise.

I-Statements also present an opportunity for ownership. For instance, if asked the question, "Why is SEL important in for students and teachers in school?", the response will usually come in the form of a You-statement. "When *you're* having a hard time at home, it can effect *your* behavior at school so *you* should be given the tools *you* need to get through emotionally hard times and focus on learning." Consider the ownership, honesty, and respect one could gain if they responded with "Well, when *I'm* having a hard time at home, I know it can effect *my* own behavior at school, so it would be great to acquire the tools *I* need to get through emotionally tough times and focus on teaching."

## Using I-Statements to Communicate

Examples of I-Statements to model and practice:

Student is disruptive for the 3rd time in a short period of time:

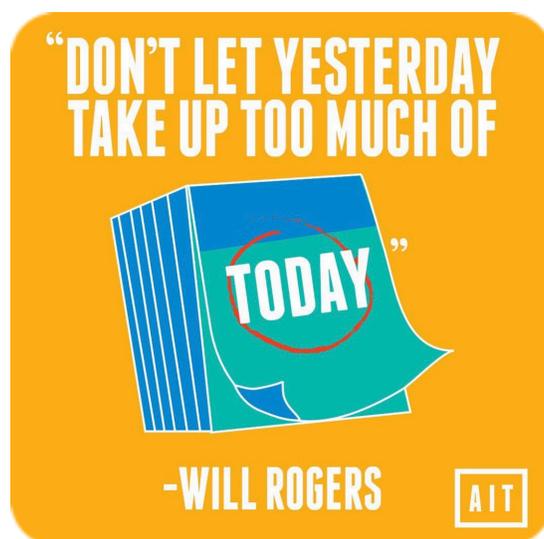
*"I am feeling frustrated that I can not meet your needs right now while also meeting the needs of the entire class. What do you need from me right now so I can also be attentive to teaching this lesson to the class?" Or, "I need you to sit quietly or Take 5 and allow me to finish this lesson for all 35 of you. I will come right over to check in with you when I am finished. You can count on me, can I count on you for this?"*

Being gracious, strong, assertive, purposeful, and understanding of them while expressing what you need also often goes a long way toward building trust. It is then important to do what we say and check in with the student.

Sharing how you are feeling, what you are doing about it, and inviting others to share to:

*"This morning I am feeling unsettled and anxious, it is interesting because there is really no new reason for this and yesterday I was feeling calm and optimistic. I am moving through these feelings and am happy to do so with you all. I am wondering who else finds themselves with feelings that change randomly?"*

Going back to Muscle 1 and giving the Benefit of the Doubt that something is going on below the disruptive actions/words, gives everyone a chance to embrace that they are safe, heard and cared for. Using the I-statement reduces combativeness and defensiveness. It is a win-win all around.





# MUSCLE #3

## Ask vs Tell

### Identify Needs and Ask for Support, Rather than Tell What's Wrong

*Asking* is a powerful tool, as it allows us to reflect on what is really going on and proactively problem solve to take care of ourselves and others. In contrast, *Telling* is making something wrong or blaming. It creates a sense of powerlessness and effectively hands our power to others.

When we learn to explore and **ask** for what we need vs **tell** what's wrong, we become powerful in expressing with genuineness and authenticity. We build trust and invite others to express openly without fear of judgement and dismissal.

**TELL:** When people 'tell' they often come across as, 1. Trying to get someone in trouble, (think tattle tales), 2. a victim, something is being done to them, or, 3. a gossip. Telling has a unique 'sound' to it and it is weak, whiney, and sometimes dramatic. Think passive-aggressive.

**ASK:** When people 'ask' they are powerfully stating a need, an opportunity to improve something for self or others. They are taking control and acknowledging a situation that they need support in. Asking has a solid, problem solving 'sound' and 'intention' to it. Think assertive.

In the classroom, this is significant when we are working with students who we feel frustrated by or who trigger us. When we consider what we need, **and** what they need, we can combine the QTIP, I-Statement, and **ask** muscles to develop meaningful and mutually respectful relationships. The key is asking based on needs, rather than telling based on reactions.

Learning to recognize and inquire about our (and others) needs is an important part of shifting our intentions and words from **what's wrong, blame, or accusation** to **what do I (they) emotionally need to make it right?** Notice what need(s) you have and how you react when they go unmet.

**Expecting others to know and meet our needs without voicing them ourselves is a set up for them to not do or say what we need at no fault of their own.** Remember Muscle 5, Walk the Talk? We want our students to let us know what is going on and ask for what they want and need. We get to do the same for them.

We may be upset with a student who regularly does not sign into the virtual classroom or complete their homework and we find ourselves writing that student off, feeling less inclined to support them, blaming them for our attitude. Sometimes we blame parents, administration, or others for things that are not going right. We need to be able to voice what we need. For educators some common deep needs are to feel successful, to feel relevant, to be appreciated, to be heard, to be noticed for our effort and heart.

**A couple of examples:**

For instance, we may be frustrated that a family member doesn't help out around the house and become cranky and unpleasant.

**TELL:** *"I work all day and come home to this mess, if you would just help out I would not be upset!"*

**ASK:** *"When I came home I was feeling exhausted and stressed. When the house was messy, I became cranky and snappy. I am not happy with that and realize that I felt unsupported and taken for granted. I need to feel valued. What can we do together to ensure both of us are taken care of?"*

Or, in the classroom a couple of students continue to disrupt the class by being goofy with each other, laughing, snickering. You become impatient.

**TELL:** *"You are being disruptive and ruining learning for the rest of the class. I can't teach because of you. If you don't stop I am going to send you out or call your parents."*

**ASK:** *"The three of you are laughing and creating a disruption that is interfering with my teaching and everyone's learning. It is important to me that I feel productive, successful and respected and that everyone else feels safe and respected. I need for you to choose to join us in learning. Can I count on you for that?"*

You are addressing a child who is disengaged, won't do homework, classwork, or take ownership for grades earned. There is always an excuse.

**TELL:** *"You are being lazy and just don't care. I can't make you care and I have done everything I know to do for you. I give up."*

**ASK:** *"I am experiencing concern for you. It seems like you don't care and I want you to know that I am not going to give up or stop caring. I can care enough for us both until you join me. What ideas do you have so we can both feel successful and proud of the work we accomplish together?"* Give the student time to answer, tell them that truly only they know the truth about themselves. Support and refrain from answering for them. It may take multiple check in's.

Which type of statement do you want to receive from others? Which one do you usually receive from others? Which one do you usually use when you are upset, when your needs are not met, not addressed, or not even recognized?



# MUSCLE #4

## Storytelling

### Tell Stories to Relate, Rather than to Teach



How do you tell stories? Do you tell them to *relate* or to *teach*? When adults tell stories, we are often trying to *teach* something, and even though we think we are helping, it can be counter productive and we push youth away from us. Storytelling to *relate* is one of the strongest bridge builders in all relationships.

**Think about those in your life who share stories of experience with you.** Are you relating to how they were feeling or are you feeling like they are telling you how you *should* or *ought* to feel? Are the stories meant to *change your mind* about something? Or reinforce that it's really *not that bad*?

**How do these stories make you feel?** What stories were you told by your parents, grandparents, or teachers that you simply could not relate to? They were telling you about their hardships; *walking backwards in the snow*, or how they *never were allowed to talk to their parents/teachers that way*, or how *you should be grateful for all I give you, I had to work for everything!*

**As the stories come to mind, what do you feel?** Could you hear, embrace, relate to those teaching/ought to stories? Or did you tune out, wish you could cross your eyes, and hope the conversation would end soon?

For the most part, storytelling to land a life lesson can not be heard by youth because as impassioned and truth-filled it might be for you, it is not their reality. They can not relate to our circumstances. What they *can* relate to is *how we felt* about those circumstances, not whether they were good or bad, right or wrong.

A student (or your child) can not relate to doing homework by themselves if they have always had someone helping them, or sitting with them. Our kids who complain about having to walk to school, or carry their own backpack, or do chores, can not hear us when we talk about how hard it was for us (so they should be grateful they have it easier) because it is not hard for them in the same way.

They cannot care about our stories because they can not relate to them, thus pushing both sides further apart. **When building Trusted Spaces, tell stories that capture the essence of what they are feeling rather than what they should be feeling.** Otherwise, what they will likely feel is misunderstood, isolated, alone, and unseen.

## Storytelling

Build meaningful relationships by telling stories that *relate*.

Our circumstances are largely irrelevant to youth, compared to our feelings. What is happening for them is their truth, and what matters is that you find a way to relate to them. Be careful that the story does not become about you, it is to convey understanding of them!

### Example Dialogue:

*"I remember when I was a kid being so frustrated and defeated when everyone seemed to understand the math problems but I couldn't. I really dreaded math, I wonder if you feel that way with writing? How can I help you get through writing time each day?"*

*"I never felt restless in class, but I remember my brother was always restless and getting yelled at for it, sometimes he would cry at home because he felt so bad that he just couldn't control himself. I recognize that you are trying, let's work together to find ways for you to manage being restless so you can learn and others can do the same. How does that sound?"*

*"When I was a student, my teachers never seemed to want to hear what we had to say. I felt invisible and ignored. I am experiencing a lot of student need for chatting and sharing, and personal frustration that I am not able to teach effectively with the disruptions. I understand that what I need and you need are different in this moment, how might we work together to make sure I can teach and you can learn?"*

**Disarm them by speaking to them with honesty, compassion, and shared feelings.**



**“LET US REMEMBER: ONE BOOK,  
ONE PEN, ONE CHILD, AND ONE TEACHER  
CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.”**

**-MALALA YOUSAFZAI**



# MUSCLE #5

## "Walk The Talk"

### Model, in Words, Actions, and Attitudes, What You Expect of Your Students.

**They are watching us!** Every minute of every day. They are noticing our actions, our words, and our attitudes. They are masters of discerning authenticity and hypocrisy in others. Noticing it in themselves can be more challenging, a lot like it is for adults.

Our credibility with others can be compromised easily when we have standards that we expect from them which we are not demonstrating ourselves. The most beautiful aspect is that we do not have to be perfect at it. Students want us to try, rebound, and try again, just like we want them to.

Who do you prefer to be around? People who ask of you what they themselves do? Or, those who ask (require) things of you that they are not willing to do? The double standard is real and our kids are watching for it.

Students are noting how we manage challenges. Respect is earned when they see us working hard to be our best human, just like we ask of them. Further respect and trust is built through ownership, understanding, and forgiveness after moments we are not so proud of.

**Modeling the following concepts/behaviors is key to building  
a Trusted Space in your classrooms.**

**Authentic Listening:** Model listening that is present and genuine. Listen to learn from them, to understand them, to relate to them. Listen for their individual insights rather than the answer you expect. Be cautious of pre-thinking your response, listen fully first - frame your response second. Use engaged non-verbal interaction, you do not have to say anything for them to know you are listening. Be focused only on them (put the phone down, look up from the monitor, etc.).

**Self-Regulation and Proactive Responding:** Model resilience, compassion, and strength. Let them experience positive recovery in challenging moments through you. Model sharing what you are feeling without shaming or blaming. Let them witness upsetting moments followed by responsible, kind, generous, honest, and controlled responses.

**Reasons vs Excuses:** Model and embrace responsibility using the concept that there is always a *reason* for our unpleasant moods, actions, and words - however, there is never an *excuse* for us to react to them in ways that are socially, emotionally, or physically harmful to ourselves or others.

## Walk The Talk

**Own Mistakes:** The perception that we are *more respected* the *less we mess up* is the opposite of what our kids want and need from us. They need us to be human with them. To show them that messing up is normal and there are responsible ways to acknowledge mistakes and move on.

**Be Vulnerable:** Just reading the word vulnerable can leave many adult leaders (yes, teachers are leaders!) shuddering. The word often has a connotation of weakness when, in fact, it is a sign of strength and humanness. It gives permission to others to be human, to experience victories, joy, pain, sadness, anger, in ways that help us move through without taking out.

Practicing each of these, along with the first four muscles, will create an atmosphere of trust, respect, understanding, patience, acceptance, resiliency, empathy, and self-efficacy. From this place, learning can begin and you, along with your students, will thrive together through the best and most challenging of times.



## Take A Moment To Reflect

What am I feeling as I get ready to greet my students, in whatever setting that is? What is my little voice saying about what the first moments will be? What is my body saying to me? Give names to feelings, share with someone at home or a colleague. All that we feel is perfect, it is simply where we are in a moment and it may or may not be where we are in the next moment. Giving ourselves this permission gives us greater empathy and freedom to give the same space to our students.

Noticing where we are, giving it voice, and reflecting on it all gives us an advantage with our students because we can be strong models for them as we invite them into sharing and connection with us and with one another.

What am I feeling, as I literally sign into a virtual classroom, or greet my masked students for the first time, in this new and uncertain school year? Noticing where our thoughts are can help us define our feelings and purposely navigate our way to a first impression that feels safe for them and successful for us. While it is ideal to do this on Day 1 of the year, there is never a bad day to start!

**“THE NEW YEAR STANDS BEFORE US,  
LIKE A CHAPTER IN A BOOK,  
WAITING TO BE WRITTEN.  
WE CAN HELP WRITE THAT  
STORY BY SETTING GOALS.”**

**-MELODY BEATTIE**



### *Reminder to Self:*

My students are truly in awe of me, they are looking to me to be my best and also be human. They are forgiving and they are watching. My greatest asset with them is my authentic self. Modeling my truth in honest, professional, and age appropriate ways earns their respect and models for them how we can be strong, resilient, and vulnerable at the same time.

# Additional Resources

Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: SEL Roadmap for Reopening School:  
<https://casel.org/reopening-with-sel/>

Brains in Pain Can Not Learn:  
<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/brains-in-pain-cannot-learn-lori-desautels>

ANXIETY & THE AMYGDALA:  
<https://www.unlearninganxiety.com/amygdala>

Understanding the Stress Response:  
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response>

Have No Fear, the Brain is Here! How Your Brain Responds to Stress:  
<https://kids.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/frym.2017.00071>

Calming Your Brain During Conflict:  
<https://hbr.org/2015/12/calming-your-brain-during-conflict>

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