What does student apathy look like?

Knowing what apathy looks like in the classroom and some of the contributing factors can help schools connect with and support students in meaningful ways.

Potential underlying factors
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Lack of sleep
- Undiagnosed learning challenges
- Trauma
- Mental health conditions
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Nutrition
- Underlying family or personal issues
- Troubled peer relationships
- Academic rigor is too much or too little

Ways to help students feel connected in the classroom.

Connect with students as individuals. When students feel supported and have a sense of belonging, they are more likely to actively engage.

Incorporate students’ interests into class discussions and activities so the lessons feel relevant. Allow students to create videos, podcasts, or other artistic interpretations to encourage imagination and novelty in the learning process.

- Allow students to have a voice and a choice. Let them pick books or topics for an assignment or have them develop the class behavior rules during the first weeks of school.
- Give students responsibilities, like greeting their peers in the morning. This helps them feel valued, active, and fosters an opportunity to interact and help others.
- Nurturing a growth mindset can help students believe that they can overcome academic and other obstacles with effort and perseverance.
- Be a positive role model in the classroom. Saying “please,” “thank you,” and “I see your hard work” can be powerful and contagious.

SOURCES: Verywellmind.com, CDC, Teach For America, and Education Week reporting.

47% of teachers say that their students showing little to no interest in learning is a major problem in their classroom. Pew Research Center, November 2023

93% of school health workers say they’ve seen an increase in students with anxiety since 2019. EdWeek Research Center survey, March 2023

By understanding the root causes of apathy, educators can provide targeted support and interventions to address individual student needs.